

Trip Through Your Wires by flippyspoon

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Summary:

Steve drops his axe.

Trip Through Your Wires

July 4, 1987

11: 47 PM

Billy was driving the kids home and that was good because Steve was still out of it, staring blankly out the window as they pulled up to the Henderson house. Billy had been watching him carefully for the last couple hours, since they'd fought off a horde of demogorgons blocking a portal and pulled Hopper out of Upside Down 2 (which Billy thought was kind of a clumsy name for a second Upside Down and even Dustin had said they were losing their creative touch).

Another week, another monster fight. It used to be, according to the kids, shit went down once in a year. Now shit was raining down all the time it seemed. They all felt the presence of the Upside Down constantly, as if they lived both there and on their earth at the same time. Then there was the government shit and the Kali shit, but that was Hopper's department really and nobody trusted anybody in any direction and Billy thought that was probably a good idea.

Henderson was asleep in the back, sixteen now and too big to stretch out comfortably in the Camaro, his knees were squeezed between the two front seats.

"Hey, Doc," Billy said, and reached back to jiggle his knee. "Up and at em'."

Dustin jerked awake and mumbled something unintelligible but before Billy got out to let him crawl from the backseat, he squinted at the boy leaning forward now, more visible in the light.

"Lemme see that forehead," Billy rasped, sticking his cigarette between his lips. He glanced at Steve, still staring out the window.

"It was just a scratch, Billy," Dustin said, rubbing his eye. "S'fine."

“Looked like a good knock.”

“Didn’t bleed much.”

“Okay.” Billy nodded. “Go clean it though.”

“Yep.” Dustin nodded at Steve, giving Billy a questioning look and Billy shook his head, expression dark. “Are we meeting up tomorrow?”

“Byers,” Billy said, hopping out and letting Dustin stumble out to the street. “Don’t be late, nerd.”

Dustin grabbed his backpack and smirked, flipping him the bird which Billy cheerfully returned. “Night, Doc.”

It was just the two of them now.

People were still setting off fireworks and Billy watched a rain of blue lights shower Hawkins somewhere near the Lab. He heard Steve murmur and got back in the car, shutting the door.

“Where’s Dustin?” Steve said.

“Went inside,” Billy said, and started up the car.

“Fuckin’ exhausted,” Steve said.

“Yeah.”

When Billy did not drive in the direction of Loch Nora, Steve frowned and leaned on his hand. “Where are we going?”

“Out.”

“Billy. I’m fuckin’ tired.”

“We need to talk.”

“About...?” Steve gestured with his hands as if he were completely clueless. And sometimes Steve was clueless but Billy knew he wasn’t this time.

Billy rolled down his window and flicked his butt into the street. "Three guesses," he said.

Steve looked away and jerked a little at the boom of fireworks, which they were driving towards. "Nothing happened," he said.

"Okay," Billy said, scoffing. "Then we can go talk about how nothing happened."

"You're making too big a deal out of this," Steve said, sounding grumpy like a kid.

"I saw what I saw."

"I dropped the axe," Steve said. "That's it. We have to talk about how I dropped an axe?"

"Since you're sayin' it like that, yeah." Billy pulled over to the one open convenient store in town and left Steve in the car to buy Marlboros. He wanted coffee so badly it was an ache, but nothing would be open in Hawkins around midnight on the 4th of July and he settled for grabbing Cokes, the harsh light of the store making his eyes sore.

"Hey, Billy," the cashier said. The cashier was an old dude with a squinty eye named Sam who Billy used to steal from in the old days. "Thought you weren't gettin' in fights anymore?"

Billy hadn't looked this beaten up in a while. Though somehow the perpetrator not being human was kind of satisfying.

"You should see the other guy," Billy said weakly, and pocketed his change and smokes.

The other guy was dismembered and bleeding black goo.

Steve was quiet again as Billy drove except to say, "We should go see Hopper in the hospital before we meet tomorrow."

"Don't worry about that," Billy said.

"I'm just saying we should-"

"I know. Don't worry about it."

"Okay," Steve said with a snort. "You say so."

"I do say so. You're not making any calls right now. You're officially dethroned." He attempted to lighten it a little and said, "Okay, King Steve?"

Steve only looked baffled. "You're...seriously, you're making way too big a deal out of this."

Billy drove them out to nowhere in particular; a stretch of road just outside Hawkins, a kind of neutral territory. Just a place to park. Billy got out and sat on the hood, lighting a fresh cigarette and popping a Coke open and waited for Steve to join him. The summer night was muggy and he took his jacket off, his t-shirt still caked with mud and goo and a little bit of Hop's blood.

If Billy closed his eyes he could still see the silhouette of Steve in the woods lit by fireworks bursting overhead as the demorgon came running, the axe dropping from Steve's hand...

Billy exhaled smoke through his nose and called out, "You comin' or what?"

Steve came out, taking his own sweet time. Billy was pretty sure his polo shirt had originally been yellow but it was so fucked up, the color was no longer visible at all. His hair was looking flatter on top than usual, curling up under his ears, and he had a streak of blood along his cheek. Billy wasn't sure if it was his blood or not. Steve plopped down on the hood and grabbed the soft pack of Marlboros without looking and Billy flicked his Zippo, lighting a smoke for him.

For a little while they just sat there, occasional bursts of colored light appearing over their town, smoking and drinking their Cokes.

"You wanna tell me what happened?" Billy said.

"I told you, alright? The gorgon rushed me, I dropped my axe. That's it."

"Yeah, maybe in a little more detail," Billy said dryly.

“Ugh. What do you want? A play by play?”

“Yeah.”

“Jesus. Look, we were fighting, it was chaotic as hell, ya know? There were what, three blocking the portal, six dogs coming up from the west side where you were and then there was Lucas almost blowing up, by the way. No more grenades for Lucas, alright? Kid thinks he’s invincible. That was some shit. And then it just-” Steve stopped, staring, eyes fixed blankly on the road up ahead. Billy waited and waited some more, smoked most of his cigarette.

Billy said quietly, “And then what?”

“And...and the gorgon...rushed me.” He shook his head. Billy watched him trying hard to play it off. “I guess.”

“Yeah...”

“And...I dunno...” He rubbed his eye with the heel of his hand, cigarette fixed between his fingers. “I dunno.”

“Do you remember?” Billy said.

“I remember,” Steve muttered. “I just...”

He went quiet again and Billy took a drag and looked down at Steve’s hands, all scraped up and bloody. Billy remembered the first time he ever really touched Harrington; grabbing his hand, pretending to help him up just to talk shit to him on the basketball court and unable to think of anything later except for how soft Steve Harrington’s hands were. They weren’t so soft anymore.

“I’ve seen you fight a lot,” Billy said. “How many times now? You’re great with weapons. Shit, the first time I saw you spin that bat and take a dog down in two hits, I about creamed my pants.” He smiled a little to himself. That seemed like a million years ago now. “You don’t drop your weapon. You’ve never done it once. You’re badass with a weapon as long as it’s not a gun. *You*,” Billy said, “don’t drop *shit*.”

“I saw inside it,” Steve said in a rush. He rubbed his forehead. “I saw

inside it.”

“Saw inside what?” Billy squinted through the smoke.

“The *demogorgon*,” Steve said. “It was running up. It was really close and I just...I saw *inside* it. It’s mouth. Or whatever. Open so wide. It was...”

Billy made himself quiet, determined not to jump in this time and sucked on his smoke.

“It wasn’t...dark,” Steve said, staring down the road. Fireworks showered close by and the lights played over his face, making his big eyes look wild. “It wasn’t... It was nothing? That’s what I saw anyway, just...nothing.”

Billy took a breath. He didn’t particularly want to hear the next part, but Steve needed to say it.

“It was just for a second,” Steve whispered. “I swear. Really...one moment. I wanted it. I wanted it so bad. Just...nothing.”

“And you dropped the axe,” Billy said, his cigarette was down to a tiny stub that singed his fingers.

“Yeah.”

“And you let it come for you.”

“Yeah.”

Billy sat with the lump in his throat until he could swallow it, quickly lighting himself another smoke. He needed to keep it together for Steve. Tomorrow morning, he knew, he’d be taping up his knuckles and going at the punching bag Hopper had bought him for his nineteenth birthday, but for now...

“I only wanted it for a second,” Steve said. “Nothing. ‘Cause if there’s nothing there’s no worrying about the next fight or somebody getting hurt or somebody getting killed or whether we’ll ever destroy the gate or if Kali tracks down the numbers or what happens if we all fail... All the *shit*. If there’s nothing, I don’t even have to dream...”

Billy must have not been keeping it together well enough because Steve grabbed his hand and said, "No, Billy, listen. I don't want to die." Billy looked at him disbelieving. "Okay, I *did*. For a second-

"If there's a fucking gorgon coming at you, a second is way too long," Billy said, throat tight. He sniffed and blinked tears back.

"I know."

"Okay," Billy said, standing up straight in front of Steve hunched over on the hood. "Here's what we're gonna do. You're benched, six months at least, and I'm talking to Hopper once he's up and running again and-

"Benched," Steve said with a snort. "Ya can't bench me."

"Watch me, dick," Billy cracked. "This is a goddamn coup d'etat."

"No," Steve said, giving him the same look he gave the kids when he was trying (and occasionally actually succeeding) in telling them what to do. "You don't get to make this call. There aren't even enough people now, if-"

"I do and I am," Billy said. "First of all, we got Lucas. 'Cause while you were busy running shit, Lucas was becoming your best lieutenant okay? You've been acting like he's still a little eighth grader with a wrist-rocket."

"Lucas?" Steve blinked at him. "Hey, if he's my lieutenant, what're you?"

"I am a mercenary, smart guy," Billy said. "Which means, you can't boss me around. Plus Byers and Wheeler are home for the summer. Guess what, they can take off the fall for one semester at least so you don't get goddamn suicidal-"

"I'm *not* suicidal!"

"For a second you were and you almost got killed!" Billy said, slamming his hand on the hood. He took a deep breath and dropped his cigarette before resting his hands on Steve's shoulders. "Steve. *Listen* to me. You are not responsible for saving the world or this

fucking town or even all your friends-”

“Yeah, you say that but-”

“You’re *not*,” Billy said, looking Steve in the eye. He looked pale nowadays, he had dark circles. Billy sighed and stroked Steve’s cheeks with his thumbs. “You are not. You can’t carry all that shit yourself. I won’t let you. It will *kill* you.”

Steve sat with that for a while, leaning into Billy’s hands and then he said, “Billy, I’m...I’m so tired.” He dropped his head and Billy kissed his dirty hair as Steve half collapsed against him. “I’m so tired. All the time I’m tired. Even when I sleep I’m tired. I don’t remember not being tired. The only time I’m not tired is when I’m actually fighting. I’m twenty years old, I feel fifty.”

“Yeah.” Billy rubbed his back and kissed his forehead and his cheek. “I think it’s like...shellshock.”

“Shellshock?”

“Like vets in ‘Nam, ya know,” Billy said softly. “This is our ‘Nam.”

“Yeah.”

“You remember,” Billy said, closing his eyes and feeling Steve breathe, “all those times I showed up at your house after some beat down from my dad? All those times I showed up drunk or just pissed and you took care of me? Even when we were barely friends? That time I threw your mom’s fancy vase at the wall and you took the heat for it? *All* of it, Steve. Everything you’ve ever done for me.”

“Mmm.”

“It’s payback,” Billy said. He leaned back and tipped Steve’s head up. His eyes were red now and Billy kissed his brow. “This is payback time. You took care of me, you take care of damn near everybody. Let me take care of you for once.”

Steve took a long breath and said, “I love you.”

“I love you too,” Billy said, kissing him carefully. “I love you so

much, asshole.”

“I’m sorry I scared you,” Steve whispered, wrapping his arms around Billy.”

“It’s okay, sweetheart,” Billy said into his hair. “We’re gonna be okay.”